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Picking 1940 Cottons on the Counter

A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Monday, April 22, 1940, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 92 associate radio stations.

U. S. Department of Agriculture

WALLACE KADDERLY:

It's still a little chilly as to weather in your Nation's capital. But we still feel sure that the laws of change will bring us more sunshine soon --- to warm things up.

Speaking of change, Ruth Van Deman is here today, instead of Tuesday her regular time. --- Ruth, I hope this doesn't mix-up your week for you?

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Not in the least, Wallace. Monday is just as good a day as Tuesday to talk about the new cottons for warm weather wear.

KADDERLY:

You aren't going to wait on the weather any longer then.

VAN DEMAN:

I have a feeling that any day now we're going to jump straight from winter into summer --- at least in this part of the country. We're going to wake up some morning and want hot weather clothes.

Anyway, that's the idea Clarice Scott has --- and the people who work with her in our clothing laboratory. They're busy making up sample dresses and play clothes from the 1940 cottons --- getting them ready to send out as travelling exhibits to 4-H Clubs and groups of women who like to make some of their own clothes.

KADDERLY:

Now let me be sure I'm getting this straight. These model dresses are part of your BEE program to help absorb some of the cotton surplus.

VAN DEMAN:

That's the underlying idea. We're trying to suggest to home sewers what can be done with some of the newer types of cotton. Miss Scott's very careful to choose easy-to-make designs for these dresses. And she always suits the design of the dress to the type of cotton goods.

KADDERLY:

In a way then this is like your work on cotton stockings. With them you're showing what can be done with a high-grade cotton yarn in women's hosiery ---

VAN DEMAN:

Yes. Making up hose experimentally that manufacturers can copy commercially.

By the way, one of our cotton stocking designs is being manufactured by a regular hosiery company. One of the mesh hose -- very good to wear with summer dresses ---

KADDERLY:

But none of your plain hose have got that far along yet.

VAN DEMAN:

Not yet. But we're still hoping. With cotton in the news, the way it is, anything may happen any day.

For instance have you heard that denim is high style now for women's clothes?

KADDERLY:

Denim? That's what overalls are made of --- that dark blue, heavy cloth. I don't see how women could wear that?

VAN DEMAN:

It's marvelous what the textile designers can do when they set about adapting an old time fabric for 1940 use. This new denim is soft, but it has the strength of the denim weave. It's ideal for women's sport clothes --- gardening slacks, out door dresses. It comes in pastel stripes in very feminine colors.

KADDERLY:

Live and learn.

VAN DEMAN:

There does seem to be something new to learn about cottons practically every day.

Miss Scott showed me seersucker, another of the old time cottons that's being restyled for all sorts of uses -- everything from evening dresses to beach clothes.

KADDERLY:

Seersucker -- that's a crinkly kind of stuff -- looks as though it has a permanent pucker.

VAN DEMAN:

That's the way to tell a true seersucker -- by that permanent pucker. It's woven with the yarns held under different tension. Imitation seersucker is just finished to look puckery. It flattens out when it's washed and has no character at all.

KADDERLY:

Seersucker isn't supposed to need ironing, is it? At least that's what they say about men's seersucker suits.

VAN DEMAN:

Pressing at the hems and seams, that's all. Easy to launder is one of the reasons why seersucker is so popular for summer clothes. It saves time at the ironing board in hot weather.

KADDERLY:

Wouldn't you say that cottons are about the easiest kind of fabrics to wash and iron?

VAN DEMAN:

That's going pretty far, Wallace.

KADDERLY:

The cotton fiber's pure cellulose. Hot soap suds don't shrivel it. The heat of the iron doesn't melt it -- or turn it yellow.

VAN DEMAN:

Unless you get the iron too hot and scorch it.

KADDERLY:

But ruling out the accidents, is there any fiber easier to wash and iron than cotton?

VAN DEMAN:

I think you can truthfully say that cotton is laundrogenic.

KADDERLY:

Laundrogenic. That's a new word to me.

VAN DEMAN:

Why not? We say people are photogenic when they get along well with the camera.

KADDERLY:

Then you'd call cottons laundrogenic --- since they get along well with the tub and the iron.

VAN DEMAN:

All three certainly do well by us in hot weather. There's nothing quite like the clean, pleasant feel of freshly laundered cotton clothes on a warm day.

KADDERLY:

Of course to be completely laundrogenic, a cotton fabric has to be colorfast -- unless it's pure white.

VAN DEMAN:

And it needs to go through a shrinkage process, ---- a process that brings the "shrink" left in it down to one or two percent..

KADDERLY:

Residual shrinkage.... I believe is the term for that.

VAN DEMAN:

That's the term. And so marked on many labels.

There are other labels, particularly on voile and gingham, that call attention to the crease-resistant finish. --- And some organdies are treated to help them keep their stiffness. These so-called permanent finishes are seldom permanent though. The stiffness gradually washes out. But it's a help while it lasts.

KADDERLY:

Like the men's shirt collars that are treated to make them stay stiff.

VAN DEMAN:

No, they're made with several layer of the fabric fused together. That's something else new in cotton manufacture -- or maybe I should say in shirt making.

KADDERLY:

Which reminds me, Ruth, it's been quite a while since we mentioned that new bulletin on men's shirts. That's full of excellent information about cotton --- how to choose cotton shirts.

VAN DEMAN;

It's still available. Still on the free list, as far as I know.

KADDERLY:

And that other new textile bulletin ---

VAN DEMAN:

"Judging Fabric Quality"?

KADDERLY:

That's the one. Is that available?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, we have some copies. And we've ordered a reprint. We expect it any day now. This "Judging Fabric Quality" bulletin does have a lot in it about cotton. About the new finishes --- crease resistance, and stiffness, and so on.

KADDERLY:

That's fine. Then, Farm and Home friends (ad lib offer of "Cotton Shirts for Men and Boys" and "Judging Fabric Quality."